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WHEN THE HIGHBROW JOINED THE OUTFIT

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BY
NINA WILCOX PUTNAM
AND
NORMAN JACOBSEN

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TO

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PART I

"Is it human?" demanded Long Henry Robinson almost tearfully, pointing a finger down the wide and dusty Main Street in the general direction of the Pride of Wyoming saloon. "I got a open mind and no undue prejudices—but I ask, *is* it human?"

Bishop Coggney disentangled the dish-rag from the butt of his revolver, flapped it idly in the breeze, and moved his great bulk in slow majesty toward the open doorway. No need for haste just because Long Henry Robinson was excited. Long Henry couldn't even keep a poker face when he had a pair of deuces; which was sufficient to

show anybody how nervous he was. But for once in a lifetime, Long Henry had some basis for his temperamental behavior. The Bishop heaved an oath which politely breathed itself into a sigh just before reaching his lips, and after a dazed, amazed second, he turned within the kitchen again, beckoning.

"Say, Kitty, kindly give an opinion on this," he said in his mellow voice. "Take a slant down the street! What is it? You're a trapper's daughter—you ought to know."

And then Kitty blew out past him on to the porch—blew by like a warm-scented breeze, such as sweeps down through the pine-belt when spring is on the mountains and the fringe of the desert comes alive with blossoms. And, as usual, she hardly looked at him as she passed. But she paused, electrified, at the top step, and threw back her curly golden head, laughing.

"It's a strange animal for these parts, all right!" she said, flashing a smile backward over her shoulder. "Though I saw

the breed when I was to school in the East! What lovely clothes!"

"Huh!" said the Bishop contemptuously. "Looks more like a screech-owl than a travelin'-man!"

"Traveling-man, nothing!" said Kitty pertly. "He's a highbrow! I can tell by those bone-rimmed spectacles!"

"Bone, to indicate the nature of the head a-wearin' 'em!" the Bishop speculated. "But what the h—that is, what can he be doin' here?"

"Come in on the stage from Cokeville," suggested Long Henry Robinson. "There ain't been such a sight in our fair city since Frank, the dago, come in lookin' for his lost bear!"

The Bishop shook his heavy head sadly.

"It's a disgrace to the county," said he, "to have a feller like that get into it alive!"

"But *who* is he?" Kitty wondered aloud. "Such beautiful hand-bags, too!" She considered the matter in silence for a moment, the breeze stirring the little curls on her

forehead in the most tantalizing manner. Then she curved back her red mouth in a way that was all her own, and spoke her sudden idea.

"Boys!" she cried, "*could* it be the new owner of The Winthrop Outfit? It *is!*"

On the instant Long Henry sprang to his feet.

"You're right, it is!" he shouted. "For he's just about due! By gum! Wouldn't you know it! Wouldn't you know we'd have the devil's luck. *That* thing to boss *us!* That owl to run our Outfit! My God!"

The Bishop swelled visibly, his huge bulk trembling with emotion.

"If that's the feller we been waitin' to meet," he said feelingly, "if that's the old boss's son, then by . . . well, I resign, that's what I do. I resign as foreman of The Winthrop! The dam' tenderfoot!"

"Wait!" said Kitty. "He's heading this way. Keep your face!"

And sure enough, even as she spoke it became evident that the object of their

discussion was undoubtedly bound in their direction. He was a tall young man, still in his early twenties, but with that air of premature age which bone-rimmed spectacles, together with a certain look of gentleness and fragility, impart. His clothes were the utmost effort of a Boston tailor in whom refinement, and a sense of what was due to the scion of one of the Back Bay's oldest families, had struggled with an Anglo-French taste in checked worsteds. The result was striking—would have been strikingly good on the Miami golf-links; but in Letterbox, Wyoming, it was a trifle—well, too good! The owner wore it as though in meek acceptance of a fate which was constantly thrusting upon him things which he did not particularly want: bone-rimmed spectacles, meticulous sport suits, handsome, weighty luggage, and sheep ranches in unknown places. In a vague, meek way, he seemed to look out from behind all these encumbrances, protesting weakly, unheard.

He did not make the progress along the

dusty main street unaccompanied. There were those Smith twins, in the unkindly attendance of barefooted thirteen, a couple of loud-mouthed younger hangers-on of theirs, and several dogs, one of which—a noted scoundrel of a watch-dog belonging to Joe Beezer, the hotelkeeper—was sniffing at the stranger's hand in an untowardly friendly manner. And making up the van in sheepish guidance, was the talker, Windy Meeks, the (according to his own statement) best dam' all round one-gun man in Wyoming! As this group reached the side veranda of Kitty's house, Windy stepped forward with the bashful, helpless air of one who introduces an uncommonly embarrassing female relative.

"Say, Bishop," said he, "this here is Mr. Orlando DeLancy De Vanderbilt Winthrop, the new owner of The Outfit."

'Orlando DeLancy Winthrop," corrected the newcomer, with a gentle smile, holding out a hand beautifully encased in yellow chamois. "Most awfully glad, Mr. —er— Mr.—"

"Bishop Coggney!" supplied the Bishop, his antagonism crouching sullenly behind slits of eyes. "Pleased to meetcher!"

"Why, I know who you are!" exclaimed Orlando, his eyes lighting like two deep lamps behind the bone-rimmed glasses. "I know; you are the foreman! How splendid to meet you right away. The stage was a little ahead of time and I would have been quite at a loss—"

Long Henry Robinson slouched forward at this junction and announced himself by name.

"Robinson," he said, with a vicious eye on those yellow gloves. "Shake!"

Orlando complied unsuspectingly, winced, but smiled again quickly, and then he saw Kitty. And the Bishop, Long Henry and Windy Meeks saw him see her, which is sufficient to say of the situation, or would be, but for the fact that it became plain Kitty had been looking at him for some minutes past—looking at him without the proper scorn, which is saying quite a little

more than enough. An impotent rage and resentment swelled in the Bishop's bosom. The temptation to muss the pretty clothes covering this pap-fed excuse for a man was almost overwhelming; but even stronger was the sense of his position as chief autocrat of Letterbox. Courtesy first.

"Our school teacher, Miss Kitty Carston," he breathed heavily. "Make you acquainted with Mr. Or—Orla—Mr. Winthrop."

"Welcome to the West, Mr. Winthrop," said Kitty sweetly. "I hope you are going to like it!"

"Thank you, Miss Carston!" said Orlando fervently. "Indeed, I'm sure I will!"

For a moment the others all seemed mysteriously excluded from the scene. It was an uneasy, unpleasing sensation.

"Ahem!" said the Bishop. "Perhaps we'd better be movin' over toward the hotel. How about it, Mr. Winthrop?"

"What—er, oh, by all means!" said Orlando DeLancy Winthrop. Then he turned

back to Kitty. "I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again," said he, lifting his soft green hat.

"Oh, sure," said she; "come over some time and help wipe the dishes!" She laughed in a friendly fashion as the group moved off, and pointed to the Bishop. "Only don't go off with my dish-rag, like that horse-thief!" she added. "Bring it back, Mr. Coggney!"

With neck and ears burning a painful crimson, the Bishop returned, the checked towel in his hand. The new owner of The Outfit laughed delightedly. The Bishop handed over her property to Kitty, unsmiling, and turned to rejoin the three waiting men, his heart afire with wrath and disgust. Ridiculous! Made ridiculous first shot, in front of this sissy from the East, this jackanapes of a dude of a tenderfoot! As if it wasn't outrage enough that the new owner of The Outfit should be such a one, he, Bishop Coggney, the invincible, had to be made a show of for him! Dish-cloth, indeed! A fine introduction to your head

shepherder. A damned dish-cloth—and Kitty and that Orlando feller laughing their heads off *together!* Kicking savagely at that well-known scoundrel of a watch-dog of Joe Beezer's, he rejoined the group, which struck off down the irregular street in the dust and the late autumn sunlight. Windy Meeks and the dainty Mr. Winthrop led the way, the Bishop and Long Henry following in a silence that was punctuated at intervals by a stealthy snicker on the part of the latter.

"Cut it!" growled the Bishop, at last, exasperated.

"I was laughin' at them gloves!" lied Long Henry with averted eye. And conversation languished until the hotel was reached.

That well-known scoundrel of a watch-dog came to heel to Joe, lounging in the doorway and eyeing the approaching guests contemplatively. Windy Meeks performed the perfunctory introductions with an added ease of manner which had come with practice, and embellished the ceremony with a wink

which Joe received and somehow managed to return unblinkingly. Then the group edged in a restless fashion toward the door of the bar. It was a significant move, but Orlando seemed not to notice.

"Dry, to-day," remarked Joe unconcernedly.

"Most awfully dusty," agreed Orlando, looking apologetically down at his impeccable tweeds. "I feel grimy as can be. Might I have a room and bath—I'd like to change?"

There ensued a heavy silence, during which Orlando looked about him questioningly, from face to face. Then Joe detached himself from the wall, and with a "Wait a sec" disappeared through a swinging door, by way of which he presently reappeared, bearing a cake of kitchen soap and a towel that looked as if it had the leprosy.

"The creek is behind the house, down through the fust meadow," said he. "And take your choice of both rooms, upstairs; the doors is open."

Orlando opened his mouth, but no sound

came from it. Then, on a second attempt, he managed something about rejoining them presently when he was more fittingly arrayed, and fled up the protesting stairway, his bags bumping the wall, the soap clutched in one hand, the leprous towel trailing behind like a retreating flag of truce. As he disappeared around the last turn of the steps the Bishop made a feeble motion in the direction of the bar, and a solemn group filed in at his heels. As soon as the horrible dryness had been somewhat eased, Coggney turned his back to the bar, and leaning upon it in an attitude severely clerical, he addressed the depressed audience.

"Boys," he began impressively, "the question is—*will* we allow it? Shall it live in Unita County? I ask you!"

Windy Meeks drew a long breath. "Not while I have my strength!" he said fervently. "Not so long—"

Long Henry Robinson was almost tearful, interrupting. "Work for *that*," he moaned, wiping his thin little moustache. "Work

for *it!* I had a pious mother, or I'd say what I thought of him right out in public! But here he is—the lawful owner. We'll have to quit, that's all—vamoose, get out, and hunt a new job. There ain't no other way!"

"Oh, but mebbe there is!" enunciated the Bishop calmly. "We might make *him* do the travelin', for instance."

A murmur of protest arose, above which Joe Beezer's voice distinguished itself.

"No shootin' on these premises," he vowed. "That stuff's all right in the movies, but it's too dam' hard on my mirrors and fixings — no cow-country entertainments 'round here!"

"Contain thyself," begged the Bishop, holding up a deprecating hand. "Who said anything about gun-play? That's old stuff; out of date. What we're after is to make him go of his own accord—hurry off for reasons of his own!"

There was a puzzled silence, broken by Windy.

"But how in the name of a one-eyed son of a—" he began.

"Listen," said the Bishop. "I'm goin' to preach a sermon. Now if the truth is told, there's mighty few crimes in this world a man is really ashamed of. Even murder's a kind of a boast—look at the notches on some of the old-timers' guns! Scandals about a woman—well, there's pretty apt to be a bouquet somewheres about it for a feller to pin on himself! And a good liar is that proud of his imagination! And so on. A man can get found out in 'most any such things and still feel a *man*. But there's one thing nobody can face—and that is bein' made an all-round fool of! Especially if he's already a good deal of a boob like this feller is. So what we got to do is to make him feel such a dam' goat, he can't bear to look us in the face. Then we will regretfully escort him to the first train East."

"And leave you in charge here!" said Long Henry.

"Huh!" growled the Bishop, "maybe you

don't think it means somethin' to me to quit this outfit! I been with it for near eighteen years, I have, and if that—that four-eyed jack-rabbit stays, I *quit*, see?"

"Don't blame you," said Windy Meeks. "I'll hit the trail myself. But how are we goin' to kid the guy along so he'll get sore on himself and go hide his face? I got a suggestion. Just listen to me—"

"By showin' him plain that he don't belong!" said the Bishop firmly. "On the outside, we're goin' to be nice to him—polite no end. And we're goin' to take him to our bosoms, so to speak—act like he was one of us—let him enter into all our gentle sports and amusements—without compunction! And skin him alive at 'em, every one. Most politely, of course!"

"As, for instance?" suggested the interested Joe Beezer.

"Possibly such as the imbibing of liquid refreshment—a friendly game of stud—or a gentle ride across country," the Bishop supplied. "And so forth! If he don't pick up

what is left of himself and take it home to mamma; and if after that any girl would think about him twice—"

"Hist! Here he comes!" warned Windy. "Good idea, Bishop, we got it! You're on!"

"Remember, polite now!" hissed the Bishop. And the next moment Orlando DeLancy Winthrop appeared in the doorway. An uncontrollable ripple of amazement ran over the assemblage, for Orlando was arrayed as the Western hero of the most metropolitan of motion-picture dramas. His wide-brimmed soft hat was pinned to the crown on the left side, giving him a spuriously rakish appearance. His negligée shirt of white silk was topped by a stock fastened with a gold pin. On his legs were khaki riding-breeches and puttees which would have done credit to a riding-master. From the midst of this wilderness of properties, his gentle, spectacled young face stared with a peculiar incongruity, and his smile, though too sweet by half, had something almost irresistibly contagious and winning about it. He spoke

with ease, and the tact of inherited knowledge of social usages.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting," said he. "And now, gentlemen, what will you have?"

When they had ordered, Orlando stood in their midst, a light beer clutched in his lily-white hand, and beamed upon them pleasantly.

"When shall we be setting out for the ranch?" he asked. "Is it far?"

"Only about twenty miles or twenty-two," replied Windy. "With good riding we'll make it to-night. I rode it in three hours once, but on a horse that—"

"We led in a horse for you," said the Bishop. "But it strikes me it's a little late to start back this afternoon. You are prob-'bly tired from the train, and the boys don't get in town often—they're a hard-working lot—so we kind of thought we might stay over. There's a high-class game on, over to Joe's brother's, too. Do you play poker, Mr. Winthrop?"

"I am really more familiar with bridge, but I know the basic rules of the game," replied Orlando. "I learned them at Harvard, and I think I could recall them quite easily!"

Long Henry Robinson suddenly choked over an apparently empty glass at this moment, and had to be restored, red of face and gasping, by a solicitous brotherhood.

"Then if you say so, we might go on down there to-night," the Bishop continued, when order had been restored. "I take it the West is new to you?"

"This particular section, yes," replied Orlando. "Though I've been in Colorado, and know the western part of Canada rather well—the woods there! There is much splendid big game still left in Canada, you know."

This was a blow. The Bishop winced under it.

"Then you're a hunter?" he asked doubtfully.

"Only with the camera," replied Orlando

reassuringly. "I have some photographs of woods-creatures which they tell me are quite unusual. I have been most fortunate in getting them. Somehow animals seem to take to me, and I have consequently been able to secure pictures of them where others have failed. They do not fear me, as they do most people. I've gone in for entomology and botany, too, since I was a small boy," he added in half-apologetic explanation of his boast.

"Well, we've only had one other nature-fancier in these parts for some time," put in Windy Meeks. "That was Frank, the dago. He had a trained bear that he said he caught wild, but I reckon it and him broke up some ways, for one day he come back to town without it. Always claimed the bear *got lost in the woods!* Used to cry over it, he felt that sorry for the poor beast! But that's quite a spell ago, and the dago cried over that bear as long as he stayed in town, fearin' it would starve to death out there all by its lonely. But once I—"

"We do have quite a few black bear in these parts," explained the Bishop, "and they're savage as the devil! I'd hate to meet up to one onprepared!"

"Then I'm so glad I brought all my cameras!" exclaimed Orlando DeLancy Winthrop. And Long Henry's cough began troubling him again.

If talkativeness were any proof of affability, after supper the Bishop's reputation for good-natured cordiality would have grown enormously throughout the district; for between the hotel and the Pride of Wyoming saloon he talked a dictionary and a half, totally ignoring the not always suppressed excitement which his companion's elaborate costume created during that progress. Orlando was responsive. They conversed about his late father, who, it seemed, had had the good sense to stay most of the time in Boston, leaving the welfare of his Western holdings in the Bishop's capable hands. And it was revealed during this conversation that Orlando intended to make

Letterbox his permanent headquarters. "Oh! *Are you?*" the Bishop commented—inaudibly, however. As they passed the Carstons' house a white glimmer in the dusk of the porch that was Kitty waved and called something. The group marching toward the uncurtained gleam in the windows of the saloon called back and passed along.

"Charming young lady," said Orlando to a curiously unresponsive escort.

The Bishop hastened the pace, swinging them off down the street and into the yellow oven of a tavern, where, in the midst of the heat, the smoke and the odors of warm leather, perspiration and dust, sundry further introductions were accomplished, and at length Orlando DeLancy Winthrop was given a place at a table over which a swinging lamp that proclaimed itself a "Midnight sun-burner" shed a broad yellow disc of light, revealing the surrounding faces by the shadows it developed upon them.

There was Long Henry, so lean and yellow, his clever nose preternaturally long and

mobile; the Bishop, stout, round and smooth as an egg, his cheeks gleaming with sweat under the eyes. There was Windy Meeks, his face like the Rocky Mountains boiled down small, and a dozen other men, seated, or standing interestedly behind the chairs, their faces crudely carved into definite lines by the rough edges of civilization. And in their midst gleamed the thin pale face of Orlando, his sensitive upper lip twitching almost imperceptibly, his eyes concealed and meaningless behind the disguising bone-rimmed spectacles. There was expectancy in the air as the professional gambler—a slick young chap with plastered-down blond curls over either ear, and a small sombrero on the back of his head like a halo, dealt.

"Ever played stud before?" said Windy Meeks in the tenderfoot's ear.

"I believe not," replied Orlando. "How does it differ—?"

"Well, this is not jack pots," responded Windy. "The value of the cards is the same, but you draw your hands different—each

feller gets a hole-card, see? And if he likes it, stays!"

"Oh!" said Orlando a trifle blankly as a card, placed face downward, was shot under his nose.

"Joe Beezer has bet two bits," whispered Windy. "It'll cost you two bits to stay—a quarter, you know!"

The initial hand was uneventful. Orlando's glasses were inscrutable as he looked at his hole-card, and, with a gentle smile he passed on the first round, having drawn a five spot; while Windy cleaned up a lean pot. The Bishop's eyes glinted. This wouldn't do; the youngster was not to stay out. He prayed heaven for luck, and accepted his deal, grunting. Then he watched. Confound that blank face of Winthrop's, anyhow! He raised the edge of his own card. It was a tray. He went on with the deal. On this Windy received a ten, and dropped, but Orlando, on the strength of a jack, made a bet, to the Bishop's satisfaction when he dealt himself a second tray,

which satisfaction swiftly turned to annoyance as he reluctantly slid a second jack across to the tenderfoot. Then followed a second king to the man on Orlando's left, and, merciful Fortune! a third tray to the Bishop himself. In a gruff tone, he raised. The pair of kings at Orlando's left kicked it. Orlando, his voice as hesitant as a girl's, raised the kings on the addition of a seven spot. With his gaze fixed intently on the perpetrator of this piece of impertinence, the Bishop raised again—and Orlando drew his third jack!

"Beginner's luck!" he said pleasantly to the Bishop as he took the cards, shuffling them somewhat awkwardly despite the slim whiteness of his long hands. To the murmur from the standees who watched, he paid no attention, seeming not to hear it. The Bishop shifted, got up and walked around his chair, and settled down to real business, as Orlando began to deal. The room was very close, and the men's faces grew more and more keenly articulative as the game progressed. Who the devil was this new

dude, that he did not make an ass of himself with due promptitude? The silence was full of the question. From the bar in the front room came the muffled sound of a voice singing—a drone half a note flat of the key, and more distantly, across the yard, a sheep was bleating in distress. Against the uncurtained window the night rested in velvet obscurity. From the very first, this next hand narrowed down to a battle between Orlando and his foreman. With annoyance and incredulity, the Bishop looked from Orlando to his own hole-card. A jack: he stayed. So did Orlando. On the second round the latter showed a five of hearts. So far so good, the Bishop muttered inwardly, receiving an ace of spades, and betting. Somewhat to his surprise, Orlando came back at him.

"I'll raise that two bits," said he. And on the next round the Bishop drew a second ace, and bet double. Orlando gave himself a seven of hearts, and the delicate voice remarked:

"I'll just double that!"

The rest followed rapidly. The Bishop got a nine and made a cautious little bet, his eyes glued to Orlando's expressionless face. The latter, having acquired a queen of hearts, raised again. Then he dealt the Bishop a second nine and the crowd instinctively closed in a little tighter. The Bishop could feel the man behind him breathe something into his ear—he did not hear what the fellow said, but his blood began to boil. He'd just show this youngster. Orlando immovably dealt himself an eight of hearts, and the silence about them became taut. The Bishop felt a red mist roll before his eyes, in the centre of which there seemed, in his mental vision, to hang the mirage of a four of hearts. It hung there dripping with the earnings of the pot, and worse—far worse—with his pride as a veteran poker-player. That this jackanapes should draw such a hand was outrage, a breaking of all traditions regarding his species. There was only one thing to do. Scare him, and scare him badly, by bluffing.

"I'm gonner bet the limit on this," he said aloud. Then the outrage of outrages occurred. The tenderfoot didn't fall. Instead, he sat there, hiding behind those damn bone-rimmed spectacles of his, and answered calmly.

"I'll raise you the limit."

For one wild instant the Bishop dreamed of calling him, but the vision of that four of hearts intimidated him while it inflamed him. How dare this Orlando not only draw such a hand, but actually play it? How dare—

"Well, Bishop, why don't yer call him?" jeered Windy Meeks, who, having dropped, didn't care. "Why don't yer call him—yer ain't scared to—are yer? It *looks* like a flush, but mebbe it ain't."

Scared! It was too much. With a howl of rage, and blinded by the red vision of that four, the Bishop suddenly leaned across the table and turned up Orlando's hole-card.

It was an ace of clubs!

At which Orlando quietly raked in the

pot. The shout of laughter that went up was like the roaring of an angry sea to the Bishop's ears. And instantly on its diminuendo, followed a scraping back of chairs, a shuffling and scuffling, a series of more or less good-natured blows on the back, and sundry cries—"Bluffed, by God! Are you loco, Coggney! Been drinking again?" and such. Somehow the table got overturned; and in one corner of the room Windy Meeks and Long Henry Robinson were doing a bear dance with the Bishop's gun, which they had removed on general principles, their arms close about each other, their tears mingling. They had both tried bluffing the Bishop in their day. Quickly the fracas became general. Hitting out is such an expressive vent for mirth. Then, suddenly, Orlando's smooth, broad accents were heard suggesting that the troubled waters be quieted by the form of lubricant to be found in the bar. Docile to this suggestion as their own sheep, the crowd swayed toward the swinging doors. And as the stragglers were making it, Orlando

came up to the Bishop, who was standing suddenly marooned amid the wreckage.

"I say, Coggney," drawled the tenderfoot, "here's the pot—you just attend to those drinks for me, will you? I'd like to slip off to the hotel and turn in. I'm rather fatigued with the journey and all that—do you mind?"

There was a perfectly friendly tone in his voice. Evidently he regarded the break-up of the game as a trivial matter. At any rate nothing in his manner even referred to it. Helplessly the Bishop accepted the money.

"Thanks, most awfully!" said Orlando. "I'll just slip out this side door—oh, don't trouble! I'll find my way!"

With which he was gone, leaving a whole string of unspoken words upon the Bishop's lips. After a silent moment, the doors to the bar swung open and Windy and Long Henry appeared.

"Where's the son of—" began Windy, and stopped short, seeing the Bishop's face.

"Givin' me the money, and beatin' it for

the hay!" responded the Bishop, his glassy eye daring them to comment at their peril. "Goin' to rest hisself for the ride out tomorrow—he'll need it!"

"How about that train he was to take?" Windy inquired mildly.

"Wait!" sternly commanded the Bishop. "Wait! Do you realize what horse he's goin' to ride to the ranch on?"

Long Henry breathed a negative. Evidently the Bishop's brain had renewed its activity.

"He's gonner ride 'Sea-cook!'" he announced after an impressive interval.

There was a horrified silence.

"Do you want to be up for murder?" whispered Windy at length.

"I won't be!" he answered, considerably cheered by their awe, and heading for the bar; "there's a fair bone-setter in town!"

Meanwhile Kitty Carston was standing at her garden gate. Under the mask of the early autumn night, the little town lay dis-

guised before her; strangely seductive, like a familiar face half hidden for a carnival. A slow moon was rising over the shoulder of the mountain, and from the fringe of the desert came the cry of a jackal in greeting. There was a pungent odor of burnt leaves and dried bracken on the still air, and the wind which rustled and whispered in the cottonwood-trees overhead was cool and sweet from the snows and the pines on Immigrant Mountain. Down the road the new drove of sheep in Beezer's corral bleated plaintively, now and again. The lights in the little houses scattered at the base of the portentous mountains were blotted out one by one, as the moon felt her way closer to the outlines of the buildings. A yellow shaft of light cut across the blue night like a golden sword, from the black spot of the saloon; and there was a spacious silence over all. Kitty sighed aloud for sheer youthfulness and receptivity, and leaned her elbows on the fence, taking care not to crush the white ruffles about them. There was not a living,

moving thing in sight. Then suddenly upon the silence there broke a muffled roar. Something was happening at the Pride of Wyoming. Something humorous—as the boys conceived humor. It gave her a little throb of anxiety which she scarcely admitted to herself:—sometimes the boys were a little rough—the sword of golden light down the road was for an instant broadened to twice its width, and an unfamiliar silhouette came through the doorway and crossed the dusty street, vanishing immediately into the surrounding blackness. The roar in the saloon died down, and presently, through the restored quiet, she could hear footsteps coming toward her. Then the moon caught and revealed him. It was the new owner of The Winthrop Outfit—alone, save for that well-known scoundrel of a watch-dog of the hotel-keeper's.

To Kitty's amazement she discovered that her heart was undoubtedly beating a little faster for his approach. There was something appealing and pathetically iso-

lated about the tall young figure in its absurdly conceived frontier costume. Of course he was a joke, and yet, and yet—. He was coming nearer every moment. Instead of turning and taking refuge in the house as she had fully intended, she further surprised herself by leaning over the gate. He must surely see her as he passed. He was humming a little tune as he approached. Something with French words, unintelligible except when it sounded like a geography.

"Je donnerai Versailles, Paris et Saint Denis,
Les Tours de Notre Dame, La Cloche de
Montpellier—"

It was exactly as a carefully brought up, sailor-collared little boy might sing—with his governess! Kitty smiled a little contemptuously to herself in the dark. Then he was abreast of her, and seeing her suddenly, stumbled a bit, recovered himself, and raised his gorgeous sombrero.

"Miss Carston!" he exclaimed. "I didn't see you at first!"

"I saw you coming out of—that is, I saw you a long way off," said Kitty, cordial despite herself. "You see, strangers are so scarce in these parts, you can tell one about as far as you can see!"

Orlando leaned against the fence, keeping his hat in his hand.

"A stranger!" said he. "That's my situation, of course. But I sincerely hope not to remain one for long. And, somehow, I don't really feel strange out here in this splendid quiet!"

He swept his sombrero toward the moon-clad mountains.

This was a surprise. Kitty looked at him sharply. His face was turned toward the sky, a fine, sensitive profile, despite the hideous spectacles.

"I love the mountains, too," said she. "I used to miss them a lot when I was in the East. My father is a trapper: one of the old sort—woodswise as a martin, and I used to be out with him a lot."

"Then you love the animals, too!"

"Why, yes," replied Kitty. "I've always had pets. Once we had a bear cub. It was the dearest thing! I've always wished for another."

"I had white mice once," said Orlando. "And no end of birds, and a pair of lizards!"

"How nice!" said Kitty. How simple he was! Indeed his simplicity was amazing, and rather—funny! "But I'm afraid you are going to find things awfully different from your home, out here, Mr. Winthrop. Our ways are not the same as Eastern ways, and the living! Of course we're not as bad as the old West you read about, but it's still a little—a little—"

"Crude?" he suggested. "Well, I don't mind that! Indeed, I have come prepared to find a rougher form of civilization!"

He smiled as he spoke, and Kitty, looking down toward the Pride of Wyoming, ventured the question that had been consuming her.

"You came out alone," she said. "Was—was there any trouble down there?"

"No trouble," said Orlando. "Just a friendly game of poker."

"And who won?" she asked.

"Well, toward the end, no one," he answered. "The honors were about even, as one might say!"

"Oh!" breathed Kitty, "I'm glad there was no trouble."

"None at all," said Orlando.

There was a silence between them for a moment or two. The moon with magic rays was making things of dross into silver. The breeze stirred his hair from its smoothness, and she thought it was nice hair when it was rumpled. He turned his hat around in his long nervous hands. Suddenly he burst into speech.

"I—I say, Miss Carston, I hope you meant it when you suggested I might come to see you sometimes," he blurted.

"Of course I meant it!" she said. "I hope you will come often if you decide to stay."

"Oh, I'm going to stay!" said he.

Something in his tone emboldened her to ask another question.

"But, Mr. Winthrop," said Kitty, "do you really think you are going to be able to live here? Do you believe you will like sheep-ranging, and be successful at it?"

There was some quality in the silence which ensued that almost made her wish she had not asked. The very turn of his head, as he looked away from her, showed that she had touched a sensitive spot. But after a moment, he faced her again, and spoke with an intensity which startled her.

"I really can't go back," said he. "You see, there's my family at home, my mother and my uncles. They—well, they don't think I amount to a great deal. I've always been rather a quiet sort of chap, you know, didn't do anything brilliant at Harvard—and haven't seemed to be able to get hold of a job that I liked, or that liked me, since I got through college. Really, I can't fail at this, too! It wouldn't do, you know! A chap has some pride!"

Kitty looked at him with new interest.

"I see," she said softly. And for another short space there was silence. "You will ride in often," she said, "for you're not more than twenty miles out."

"I will do so soon," he replied eagerly.

"I hope you will," Kitty assured him.

Again conversation languished. Orlando DeLancy Winthrop seemed upon the horns of a dilemma—whether to go or to stay. It was as though he could not tear himself away, and yet felt that his time was up. Kitty smiled to herself. Poor fellow, how absurd he was—a dude in clothing only —with the heart of a child, and his transparent admiration for herself. Of course it was ridiculous to consider him as a man beside the Bishop or Windy or the others, still—his clothes were lovely, and so was his language when he talked about the mountains. She took pity on his embarrassed silence.

"When are you riding out to the ranch?" she asked conversationally.

"Eh! er—to-morrow morning!" he replied, startled out of a half dream.

"It's nice down your way," she said. "It's my favorite ranch-house and it has the nicest situation of any in this district."

"Really!" exclaimed Orlando. "How fortunate—for me—that is, I am so glad you like it."

"It's right on the edge of the desert," said Kitty, "where you can see for miles and miles with nothing to cut off the sky. And the sage seems to get all purple and blue at sunset. And the other way, behind it, are the mountains. And there's a creek, with willows, very handy for the housework when the tank is empty."

He leaned toward her as she talked, and something that emanated from him made her want to go on.

"This is all wonderful country," she continued. "Wait till you see the sheep changing pasturage—thousands of them! They graze down on the desert when it's winter, and then in the summer they go up in the

mountains where it's dangerous because of the wild things, but there's always pasturage on the edge of the snow—and you should see the creek here at shearing-time! There's nothing like it—nothing! Oh, I've been East to school, but this is the place to be!"

"You are a poetess," said Orlando, when she had done.

"Oh no!" said Kitty, "I couldn't rhyme it, like Tennyson or Wordsworth!"

Then Orlando said something which she didn't comprehend at all, but which was somehow pleasant to hear.

"*Vers libre!*" said he. "It is the feeling that counts—the secret sentiment betrayed by the very barren simplicity of the words!"

"Yes," agreed Kitty vaguely, because she felt she ought to say something. All at once their situation was mysteriously reversed, and she was the tenderfoot—she, the most educated person in the country, except the doctor! But the feeling was not altogether unpleasant, for it made Orlando seem a man, and she merely a woman, and she somehow

wanted Orlando to be—a man. And that necessitated some sort of superiority on his part. She was glad he had been unintelligible. For she did like him—his clothes were so nice.

"About what time do you think you'll be starting off to-morrow?" she said, reclaiming the conversational reins.

"About nine o'clock," he replied. "We should not be too late in getting on our way."

"Nine!" she said. "I'll be just about opening the schoolhouse. It's next door to the hotel, so I'll see you go!"

"Oh, will you!" said Orlando. "How fine!"

He raised himself from the fence, and stood before her in the road. His face was in shadow, but the picture she made in the flood of moonlight, with her ruffles of white and her yellow head gleaming, was reflected in the tremor of his voice.

"You surely will be there, to-morrow, Miss Kitty?" he said. "When we start off? Somehow it would be a great help to me if

you would. You see, I'm a little like a chap going to Europe for the first time, don't you know—unknown waters, foreign lands ahead, and all that—and he feels a whole lot better if there's at least one friend on the pier to see him start. You understand, I'm sure. You don't think me an impertinent ass, do you, for talking like this and assuming your friendliness and all, do you?"

"Of course, I understand," said Kitty a trifle breathlessly. "And I'll surely be there on time."

"Thanks, awfully!" said Orlando with a nice smile. "Good-night!"

"Good-night," replied Kitty.

Then his face vanished into the shadow of his big hat, and soon the rest of him vanished also down the obscurity of the street beyond, that scoundrel of a watch-dog following meekly behind.

For several moments Kitty stood quite still, though the sound of his footsteps had died away. A white moth came and fluttered around her head, even alighting on her

shoulder, but she never noticed it. Then at length she sighed and turned from the gate.

"But he is *too* silly," she said as though in contradiction of some statement. "What nonsense—still, I couldn't disappoint him at nine o'clock to-morrow!"

PART II

With the early sun lending an added freshness to his already ruddy countenance, Ted Barringer rode briskly into town, mounted on a buckskin pony, and pleasantly conscious of a new pair of fringed gauntlets. There was enough crispness in the air to make both horse and man wish they had a bit further to go, and knew where there might be an extra world or two to conquer. Reluctantly they came to a halt, however, before the still shuttered portals of the hotel, and Ted gave a "hallo." It was answered presently from the rear of the building, and the newcomer, allowing the pony to investigate from whence the sound came, discovered Windy Meeks in the act of braiding the forelock of a neat roan. Windy was smoking an amateur cigarette, and humming an unholy

little song which he broke off into a greeting.

"'Lo, Ted, you lump of pork!" he said amiably. "How's things?"

Barringer swung from his mount, and approached, carefully drawing off the new fringed gauntlets in a manner that was at once modest and conspicuous.

"Slept half-way in," he announced, noting Windy's silent appreciation of his new adornment, "and started early. Good thing I did, too. Say, do you know what I seen?"

"An angel," guessed Windy promptly.

"Don't get funny; what d'yer think?"

"Well, what?"

"Fresh bear tracks!"

"You don't say!" exclaimed Windy. "Where?"

"Right down across the road through Fontenell cañon!"

"You don't say," repeated Windy. "Hey, come on in and tell the Bishop. He ain't up yet. It's a shame to miss this chance! Got your rifle here?"

"Yep!" said Barringer.

The two entered the hotel by way of the kitchen, where John the Chink was mysteriously preparing the morning meal, and ascending to the room inhabited jointly by Long Henry Robinson and the Bishop, entered without the formality of knocking. Long Henry was about dressed, and the mountain under the bedclothes that was the Bishop unrolled itself and received the news with equanimity.

"Huh!" said the Bishop, sitting up. "So you'd like us to drop everythin' and go after imaginary bear, eh? Nothin' doin'! We got other game *right here!*"

"What do you mean, other game?" demanded Ted Barringer.

"We got a tame animal here, with four eyes," explained the Bishop, "that's worth any six of your bears—that probably don't exist! And he's goin' to give an exhibition in an hour or so. Stick around."

"What the—" began Barringer.

"The new owner of The Winthrop has

come," explained Windy. "Blew in on the Cokeville stage, yesterday. He's the tenderest tenderfoot—"

"Positively succulent!" the Bishop pronounced, rolling out of bed.

"An' he's gonner ride Sea-cook out to inspect his property!" added Windy.

"Oh, *is* he!" said Barringer, "then, believe me, I'll stick!"

"That's more than he will."

Breakfast at Beezer's Hotel was an informal affair, served by the silent Chinaman, no matter what name he was summoned by—John, Tom, Chink, or a mere expletive. But though the company was noisy enough, Orlando did not seem to hear, for time crept on, and still he did not put in an appearance. A traveling salesman, entering in the glory of store clothes, caused a momentary stir on the part of Ted Barringer, who was promptly set right.

"Oh, that feller ain't a patch on him," the other assured him positively. And the Bishop added, "I suppose his lordship don't

get up till late. Maybe we'd ought to go up and manicure him."

"That hand he bluffed you on last night didn't need no manicure," remarked Long Henry Robinson, thoughtfully picking his teeth.

"Aw, shut up!" growled the Bishop. "A fluke, that's what it was—a accident. The feller didn't know what he was doin'!"

"Mebbe!" said Long Henry.

"I wish he'd get up," remarked the Bishop, changing the subject. "Does he think we got nothing to do but hang around here all day?"

"I don't know what he *thinks*," said Windy Meeks, "but here he comes—and not down the stairs, neither!"

He pointed at the window, and there, sure enough, was Orlando DeLancy Winthrop approaching along the trail through the field where the creek was behind the hotel. He was walking leisurely and was burdened with an extraordinary collection of impedimenta, most conspicuous of which were a butterfly-net on a long handle and a flapping

bath towel. He wore the "Western" outfit of yesterday, with the objectionable hat still pinned up on one side, and there were now a kodak slung over one shoulder by a strap and a pair of field-glasses where there should have been a gun. As he drew nearer a heavy sigh went up from the audience; and then Orlando disappeared from sight temporarily, only to enter the room in another moment, smiling pleasantly, and blinking at them all in a friendly way through the enormous spectacles.

"Ah! Good-morning, gentlemen," said he. "I am glad to see that you are up at last! Fine day!"

Windy Meeks and Ted Barringer exchanged an otherwise inaudible comment; short and crisp, it was unheard beyond themselves, and hardly cordial. The Bishop, on the other hand, conquered his feelings, and in adherence to his settled policy, arose in greeting.

"Good-morning, Mr. Winthrop," said he. "Goin' to have some breakfast?"

"Thanks, I had mine some time ago!" Orlando replied. "And I've since been giving the neighboring fields an examination. I find several unfamiliar specimens of beetle—" he paused here and searched in the depths of the butterfly-net, bringing forth a creature which buzzed loudly. He laid it on the table, where it crawled about uneasily, and then he offered a magnifying glass to the Bishop, who took it helplessly and applied it to his eye.

"No, no!" said Orlando gently. "You hold it over the bug—this way."

"Oh!" said the Bishop, peering over it, the back of his neck growing red with annoyance; but he obeyed none the less.

"See," said Orlando, "its antennæ are unusually long."

"You bet," said the Bishop, handing back the glass and rising. "Vurry interestin', but how about gettin' started on our way?"

A gasp of horror went up as Orlando exposed a wrist watch to view before answering.

"Eight o'clock!" said he, totally uncon-

scious of the sensation he was causing. "A trifle early—say in about an hour?"

"All right," said the Bishop; "I guess I kin get my trunk and silk hat packed by then if the rest can. Nine o'clock, boys!"

Ted Barringer arose to protest.

"Hold on," he cried miserably. "You ain't goin' back without even a smell of that bear, are yer?"

"Oh, shut up about that bear!" growled the Bishop.

"But I tell you—" began Ted excitedly, "I tell you—"

"No, you can't tell *me!*" retorted the Bishop. "For we've got something else to do like I told you before."

Barringer subsided at this, but Orlando had heard.

"A bear!" he exclaimed. "How delightful! I wish I might photograph it!"

There was an instant of confusion in the corner; Long Henry Robinson's cough was troubling him again. But when he had been partially restored, and led outside with his

face still buried in his handkerchief, the Bishop explained. "The boys get all excited about a bear," he said, "and the minute they think there's one anywheres around, why, they're after it! But Barringer here has a terrible imagination; there probably ain't none. But if one turns up, why, you can take its li'l' pitcher," he added comfortingly. "And now I'd better mosey along and see to the horses," he continued. "I take for granted that you ride, Mr. Winthrop."

Orlando smiled. "Why, yes, I think so," he replied in his quiet way, "having always ridden a little in the park. But I had several special lessons in the riding academy at home in preparation for coming out here."

"Oh, is that so!" remarked the Bishop politely, ushering him to the door. "See you later, Mr. Winthrop. I'll be around with the horses at nine."

Long Henry was waiting for the Bishop on the porch, and as that bland monument of urbanity emerged, he seized him by the sleeve and drew him off into a corner.

"Now, look here, Bishop," he said huskily, "don't give him Sea-cook to ride—*don't!* It's murder, that's what it is!"

"Say, do you want that simp to leave town or don't you?" the Bishop demanded.

"Of course I do!" Long Henry retorted indignantly, "but—he ain't done no harm—hobble his stirrups, and give him a bucking roll, anyways!"

"Sure!" agreed the Bishop. "Lend me your coat for it. Say, you ain't goin' over to his side, are you?"

"Not by a damn sight," retorted Long Henry. "Think I want to work for a camera fiend?"

"Well, then!" the Bishop waved the borrowed coat, and started off toward the stables. Long Henry sighed and rolled a cigarette. Certainly there was a disturbing element in the air, and had been since the tenderfoot's arrival. The sooner he went, the better!

When Kitty Carston awoke that morning

it was with a vague, pleasant sense of expectancy. For a long lazy moment she lay staring at the low ceiling of her room, and wondering; then she remembered Orlando and smiled. And as she dressed she smiled again and again. When it came to the point of choosing a gown, she took down a clean calico print from the hook, looked at it thoughtfully, and shook her yellow curls in an emphatic negative. Then she unearthed a flowered muslin that had flounces, and put that on instead, preening herself before the scrap of mirror, and fastening a blue ribbon about her golden head. Then she frowned and took off the flounced muslin.

"My Sunday dress," she said aloud, contemplating it as it lay on the bed. "What silly nonsense!"

She picked up the calico of every day and slipped her arms into the sleeves, looking into the mirror; but it wouldn't do.

"No!" she said. "It—it really should be shortened before I wear it again—I guess I will just *have* to wear my best dress, after

all!" And so, persuaded by a reason which she was satisfied had nothing whatsoever to do with Orlando, she slipped out of the calico and into the flounces once more. Then she discovered with dismay that it was only half-past seven o'clock. Still, there was breakfast to get and the house to set in order. She hurried down the stairs and into the kitchen, stopping to peer through the side window before she stirred up the fire—and so noted the brisk advent of Ted Barringer and his new gauntlets. Then she set about her simple tasks, trilling a little tune—the same one over and over, until she realized it was that which he had sung—the one with the foreign words—so she stopped it, and began on "Yankee Doodle."

Breakfast and the housework, which were usually intolerably long, somehow got themselves finished with magical swiftness, leaving nearly an hour to school time. So she set herself at the besmirched illegibilities which the pupils had presented as compositions the day before; but the labor on them grew to

a Herculean task when gauged by the slow ticking old clock on the kitchen mantel shelf—suppose the boys should get started a little earlier! She shook her curls resolutely and returned to her task. No nonsense for her! But her best blue pencil was at the schoolhouse, and how could she satisfactorily correct exercises without it?—Impossible, really! She stacked the bedraggled papers, and picked up her hat, starting for the door. Then she returned to the mirror and fluffed her curls out a little. After all, the blue ribbon was better than the hat! She tossed the latter into a corner and stepped out into the clean autumn sunlight.

The air was bracing and fresh, with yet a lingering warmth in it; a perfume of harvests ripe and gathered. And the little town was gently astir at its morning routine. Women were shaking rugs from their back verandas, the general manager of the combined store and post-office was setting forth an anæmic display of oranges and bananas on his steps; the Pride of Wyoming lay

like a late-sleeping bell, with closed shutters, and Joe Beezer was puttying a pane of glass in one of his front windows. Taken all in all, it was a peaceful scene without portent of great events in it. The children were clamorously schoolward bound, their faces still comparatively clean, their shouts clear and shrill. From several of the houses, as she passed, little girls came to join her, talkative, or sweetly shy, clinging, adoring. But for once she scarcely noticed them, as they clustered about her, holding her books and papers while she unlocked the schoolhouse door. They followed her with nerve-racking clamor as she entered.

Inside, the little building seemed intolerably close, dusty and confining. She straightened her desk, and flung the windows open wide, looking with unadmitted anxiety toward the blank front of the hotel beyond. But as yet there was only the imperturbable Joe Beezer, puttying his window in a leisurely manner, and whistling—*what?* Yes, actually whistling the tenderfoot's foreign little song!

She glanced at her watch; ten minutes to nine! Around the corner of the hotel, Bishop Coggney appeared, leading a saddled horse, and followed by a second—his own. He saw her at the window and waved a greeting. She had scarcely time to respond before Windy Meeks rode around from the opposite side and dismounted. He was followed almost immediately by Long Henry Robinson, who emerged from the same quarter, leading his mount. Kitty left the window hastily and ran to the little mirror which hung in the entryway. As she peered at herself she devoutly hoped that the Smith twins, who were viciously chanting something in unison outside, would behave well at the critical moment of Orlando's appearance! She gave the blue ribbon in her hair a pat, pulled a curl into place over her left ear, and sauntered to the doorway in a casual manner—to hear what those Smith twins were singing, the dreadful creatures!

Over at the hotel an informal crowd had gathered, and there was an air of expectancy

about them that was at first difficult to account for. Joe Beezer had stopped mending his window, and was talking in an earnest, remonstrative manner to Windy Meeks, who grinned slowly for answer. Long Henry Robinson was rolling cigarettes for the gang, passing nervously from man to man; and Ted Barringer posed at one side, hands on hips, in such a manner that (quite unintentionally) the new fringed gauntlets showed to advantage. Several other men from The Winthrop Outfit had foregathered, together with the Chinese cook and a mob of schoolchildren. In the midst of this throng, which kept a safe and sane distance, were Bishop Coggney and the mount for the new owner.

This animal was the centre of attraction; and justly so, for it could have been truly said that seldom, if ever before, had so many danger signs been implanted by Nature on any single specimen of his kind. He was uniquely, distinctively marked with every sign that the knowing horseman recognizes—and avoids! He was possessed, in the first

place, of four lovely white stockings—as clean and innocent looking as a baby's socks. He was blaze-faced, with one "glass" eye, and a Roman nose, and a blue-black coat like a satin sheath. For the moment he was quiet as a lamb, pretending to be looking somewhere over the heads of the crowd—at a sweet and distant vision of the horse's heaven perhaps—such a gentle, lofty, innocent look he had. But he deceived nobody; not one in all that crowd but could read the signs upon him. Even the Smith twins knew, and chanted joyously of his self-evident characteristics:

"Four white feet and a Roman nose,
Cut off his head and feed him to the crows!"

He was saddled and bridled, and the stirrups were hobbled and a bucking roll formed of Long Henry Robinson's coat protected the horn.

"Why, it's Sea-cook!" Kitty exclaimed under her breath, "the Bishop's own horse! Surely he can't intend to let Mr. Winthrop—

the creature won't let anybody but the Bishop come *near* him, and everybody *knows* it!"

Everybody knew it, evidently, except Orlando DeLancy Winthrop, who now appeared in the doorway. A murmur arose at his appearance. For Orlando was equipped for the trip. He had his suitcase and his hat-box, camera, butterfly-net and glasses, all complete. For a long moment he stood there in the doorway with his impedimenta, and then he looked across and saw her, Kitty, on the schoolhouse steps. With almost incredible swiftness he thrust his belongings into the idle hands of the stupefied Long Henry Robinson, and apparently oblivious of the Bishop, of the horse, and of the waiting crowd, crossed directly to her, smiling and uncovering his sleek head as he came.

"I was so afraid you would not remember!" he exclaimed. "It's awfully good of you!"

Kitty blushed. Those Smith twins were giggling and taking notice — the horrid things!

"Why, I wouldn't forget!" she said in a low voice. "It would be so—inhospitable!"

"And may I see you soon again?" he begged.

"Of course! The first free evening you have," replied Kitty.

He hesitated, as if there was much that he still desired to say. But the consciousness of the waiting crowd was beginning to pull at him. He twirled his hat nervously.

"I suppose I must be off, then!" he said reluctantly. "Good-bye, Miss Kitty!"

Kitty looked at Orlando, and then at Seacook, and gasped, holding out a detaining hand. "Wait a moment, Mr. Winthrop," she begged hastily. "I wanted to ask—"

"Yes?"

"*Can* you ride?" she asked, herself surprised at the entreaty in her voice.

"I hope so," he said, with a slight smile. "You see, I have been taking some lessons—at the academy in Boston!"

"Oh!" said Kitty feebly. "I—I'm glad of that!"

"Well, good-bye for the present," said Orlando cheerfully, and setting the absurd hat on the back of his head, went forward to his doom.

She watched him with a horrible sense of foreboding. Why, oh, why, had she not really warned him about that awful animal! Was there really some challenge in his eye which had entreated her not to, or had she responded to something courageous with which her imagination had endowed him? He walked back to his men with a simple directness that made her wonder. What would happen? Would he be killed? He easily might be! It was terrible of the Bishop and the boys to do this thing! If he were killed, it would be murder, no less! With a sickening feeling of having helped betray him, she watched him approach his horse, scarcely able to control the cry of belated warning which sprang to her lips.

One other personality in that group was intensely interested in the proceedings—and that was Sea-cook himself. With a glassy

eye, gazing, apparently at the landscape, at the sky, at anything but the crowd and Orlando, he assumed an air of complete detachment. *He* was not concerned! But like the star actor who feigns utter contempt for, and oblivion of, his audience, he was none the less keenly conscious of it, and lying low for his first dramatic effort. This was a seemingly mild and subtle action. Orlando approached him and attempted to lay hands upon the horn of the saddle. With a rhythmic movement that was like the gentle retreat of a wave, Sea-cook removed himself just out of reach. That was all; but it left Orlando clinging to the air with one hand. Then Sea-cook stood perfectly still again, as if nothing had occurred, and Orlando had another try. Again the seemingly absent-minded beast moved just out of reach—subtly, almost unconsciously, it looked, but still—out of reach! A third unsuccessful effort on Orlando's part, and the crowd murmured a unanimous titter. The Bishop came to the rescue at this point, suave, solicitous, helpful.

"Perhaps you'd rather have another horse, Mr. Winthrop," he suggested.

Orlando regarded him calmly.

"If this is the horse you brought for me to ride," said he, "I intend to ride it!"

"As you say," assented the Bishop cheerfully. "Suppose we blindfold him, then, while you mount—he's a trifle nervous, and we do that, sometimes."

Orlando agreed, and the blindfolding was proceeded with, Sea-cook submitting gracefully to having the light of day cut off by Long Henry's blue bandanna. He sank down in the centre a little, and braced himself, but otherwise made no objections. Orlando succeeded in grasping the horn this time, and in another instant was in the saddle.

"I expect I'm all right now," he said in a clear voice, which carried amazingly on the waiting silence.

"Good!" snapped the Bishop, drawing off the blue bandanna with one hand, and making a lightning-swift pass at the horse's face with his hat, which he wielded with the

other. Then a startling thing happened. Sea-cook moved backward so suddenly that Orlando found himself with both arms around the creature's neck, and then, on a quiet instant, managed to straighten himself back in place before the crowd had time to laugh. However, this was only a beginning. With one incredible motion, Sea-cook proceeded to completely reverse himself, leaving his tail where his head had been an instant before. So swift was the jump that it left Orlando in the saddle, to be sure, but with his head turned backward at what ought, by slow human calculation, to have been the horse's ears! There was a murmur in the crowd such as is in the wind just before a storm breaks. Orlando was seen to say something, inaudible to those who watched from a safe distance, but evidently wholly unacceptable to the horse, who heard, and instantly showed his resentment by tucking down his head and performing a series of calisthenics which might best be described as rotating diagonally. But in connection

with all this there remained evident a fact more astonishing even than the eccentricities of equine imagination, *for Orlando was still on the horse's back!*

There was a wholly unexpected element, and gave the finishing touch of relish to the whole. The audience roared and stamped and whistled—especially those Smith twins. Over in the schoolhouse doorway, Kitty clung to the lintel, sick and faint.

"*Some* Boston ridin' academy!" yelled Long Henry Robinson, throwing up his hat.

"You wait—Sea-cook ain't through yet!" bellowed the Bishop, his excitement getting the better of his discretion.

And his prophecy was correct; Sea-cook was nothing like through. He didn't want this intruder on his back, and he wasn't going to have him. Moreover he was a horse of resource and inventiveness out of the common, and intended to display the fact. If ordinary bucking, changing ends, and rearing wouldn't work, a few well-calculated hops might—an imitation of mountain climb-

ing might be of advantage. Out of one corner of his eye, Sea-cook espied Joe Beezer's wood-pile, conveniently arranged in three chunky sections, and admirably distributed for an exhibition of high jumping. This opportunity was no sooner seen than grasped, and next instant the audience was treated to the spectacle of Orlando flying like Perseus on a modern Pegasus over the three wood-stacks one after another, and back again. But from Sea-cook's point of view, the scheme was a failure. For when he landed, sweating and snorting, in a precarious position amid a pile of hay-rakes, Orlando was still with him. This was too much! It was an outrage of all tradition, and with blood in his eye Sea-cook looked about for other experiments.

A low fence of stone divided the hotel yard from the street, and with a bound Sea-cook was upon it, attempting an acrobatic feat unequaled in his record. But something went wrong. A stone was loose, perhaps, or rage made his balance unsteady, for there was a sudden crash, a chorus of yells

and screams from the spectators, as Seacook fell, landing on his side.

Her heart sick with fear, Kitty uncovered her eyes slowly at the sudden hush which fell upon the crowd. He was killed! Oh, surely! How could she look—yet look she must and did, the color flooding back into her cheeks with the act. For there beside the fallen horse stood Orlando, uninjured, *and cursing like a man!* The horse was struggling to his feet, apparently also little the worse for wear, and the crowd was closing in around the pair of them, Bishop Coggney hastening to the control of his pet.

As he came face to face with Orlando, he almost started back from the look of cold contempt in the latter's eye. Orlando stood wiping the bone-rimmed spectacles, which were not so much as cracked, and for the first time the Bishop really saw his eyes—dark and blazing they were, and singularly piercing. It was utterly unexpected and made him feel most uncomfortable. He had not

wanted this! Perhaps a little conciliation was advisable at this point.

"So Sea-cook couldn't lick you, Mr. Winthrop," he grinned.

"Nor I him," said Orlando, replacing his spectacles. "I think it was about fifty-fifty."

"Now will I get you another horse," asked the Bishop as they made their way back to the hotel porch, "so we can go on to the ranch?"

Orlando did not reply immediately. He was looking over in the direction of Kitty, leaning against the edge of the door, and he had suddenly turned very pale. Almost it seemed as though he might be deathly sick in another moment.

"No," he said quietly, at length, "not now—I—I am a bit shaken up—I think perhaps we won't go out till to-morrow. And now, if you will excuse me, I believe I'll go to my room for a while."

Still very white, he moved shakily through the door and disappeared up the stairs, leav-

ing his suitcase, his hat-box, his butterfly-net, *et al.*, to the care of his Outfit.

"Well, I'll be—I'll be—gosh swiggered!" breathed Windy Meeks feebly. "And just as I was about to swear a life of devotion to him, too! Sick, like a girl, when it's all over!"

"However, it *was* all over!" suggested Long Henry Robinson thoughtfully. But no one paid any attention to him. The Bishop stood in utter silence, staring up the empty stairs as at a vision, and slowly the crowd began to disperse. The school bell tinkled, and the children filed in, those Smith twins last and most reluctantly, with many a backward glance.

It was just after sunset when Orlando caused his second sensation of the day. A ruminative pipe or two eased the hearts of such members of The Outfit as were lounging upon Joe Beezer's porch; but when Orlando appeared that ease was gone, for the two costumes preceding were as nothing to this

third. From the suitcases had come another miracle—this time of creamy pongee, with snowy shoes and a white felt hat of the type known as "sports." He passed them like a wraith in the twilight, and, apparently completely recovered from his effort of the morning, walked briskly up the street, that well-known scoundrel of a watch-dog of Joe's instantly rising from the step and following him, taking up his post outside of Kitty's gate when Orlando entered thereat.

"What'll he do next?" moaned Long Henry, shaking his head dolefully, "what'll he do next?"

But nobody answered him.

Kitty was just clearing the supper table when Orlando came. Puzzled by the quality of the step on the porch—neither heavy enough for riding-boots nor light enough for one of the village women—she called a rather tentative "Come in," and then her heart caught her breath up short for an instant in a most annoying way. What a

portrait of elegance and grace he presented, to be sure! Just like the pictures of swells at a summer resort! Her heart thrilled to the silken sheen of his coat; never, no never, had she seen anything so lovely! Taken atop of his performance with the horse, it was almost too good to be true.

"Why, Mr. Winthrop!" she exclaimed.

"I—I hope you are not angry with me for coming again so soon," he said, smiling.

"No, indeed," exclaimed Kitty. "It is awfully nice of you! Shall we sit in here, or outside?"

"Outside, by all means!" replied Orlando. "It's quite mild out, and the moon is going to be full to-night."

She led the way onto the porch, he carrying some cushions which she gave him, and they settled themselves upon the top step. Moon and sun were still contending for the heavens, the east silver, and a faint pink still lingering in the west. Distantly some men were singing—a rough, swinging tune, sweetening as it receded into the gray heart of the

mountains. The village lamps had a magic glow to them to-night, and life was a pleasant thing! Kitty sighed, deliciously disturbed by the hour, the aspect of her caller, and the mood he brought; sighed, and leaned her back against the column at the foot of which she sat. From his place outside the gate, that well-known scoundrel of a watch-dog arose and lazily entered, stretching himself at their feet, nose on paws, one watchful, adoring eye fixed on Orlando. After a time she began to feel that she ought to speak. Suppose he should think her a raw, ignorant country girl with no manners! And so, though she would infinitely have preferred to sit a while longer in that precious silence, she broke it.

"How are things going?" she asked.

At once he understood that she referred to his progress in the silent battle in which he was engaged with his men; although this was their first direct reference to it.

"Not awfully well," he said dolefully; "you see I—"

"Well?" she encouraged him, feeling that he wished her to do so.

"I just can't seem to do the right thing," he confided, as though they had talked it all out, gratefully seizing upon the intimacy of understanding that she implied. "Every time I think I'm gaining a little better footing, I make a blunder—and the worst of it is, I honestly don't know what the blunder is!"

The face he turned to her as he spoke was so full of genuine puzzlement that Kitty gave a little gasp of comprehension. He really didn't know! He had no notion of why the boys resented him, and was hurt and baffled by it! Without a doubt he wanted help, wanted to know what the trouble was, and what he was doing that was wrong. But how on earth could one enlighten him? Who could say that his Outfit, one and all, thought him ridiculous, a fop, a ninny that must be got rid of, and that his sick spell after the incident of the horse might have been overlooked, but his silk

suit, never? Besides, it was a *beautiful* silk suit, and she liked to see him in it! If the boys only *knew* how much better they would look if they dressed up a little! But the boys' notion of dress was fringed gauntlets and ornamental sleeve garters. Indignantly she championed his taste in her heart, but aloud she could only voice a stumbling answer.

"You see, the East is so very different," she said. "And they think, out here, that the only way is the Wyoming way!"

"I suppose so," replied Orlando, with a heavy sigh. There followed a long silence then during which they sat almost immovable, while the moon took possession of the world. Kitty watched him furtively. Certainly he was charming in a way, as a prince—and as remote! That thought gave her a pang, and she was glad that the shadow of the roof was upon her face. And shortly she was even gladder, for all at once Orlando made one of his wholly unexpected moves. Without any preliminaries he came over

close beside her, and taking one of her hands in both of his, pressed it to his lips.

"Oh, Mr. Winthrop!" exclaimed Kitty, without, however, struggling very hard to free herself. "Oh, Mr. Winthrop!"

"Miss Kitty," he said sharply, in a low, tense tone, still holding her hand with his long fingers. "Oh, Miss Kitty—please don't think me fearfully crude, or—or crazy, or anything like that, or that I don't know what I'm saying—but I love you! Truly I do! Please don't draw away! It's true—I swear it! You are the most wonderful—"

"But, Mr. Winthrop!" Kitty found herself gasping, "I—you—"

"Oh, I know you have only known me for two days," he said earnestly, "and that I have made a pretty poor showing during that time! But don't you think that perhaps you could some day—"

Kitty's head was reeling. This was whirlwind wooing with a vengeance; it took one's breath, one's senses! Who could have been prepared for it? One of the boys perhaps

might have rushed in this way, but coming from this cool-seeming, elegant person—just what did he mean by it?

"But you have only known *me* two days," she protested.

"That's long enough for me to recognize you," he said. "Oh, Miss Kitty, you haven't been out of my thoughts since I first saw you! Do you—do you think—"

"What?" asked Kitty breathlessly, as he paused.

"Do you think that you could ever care enough for me to marry me?"

Was it possible? Had she heard aright? She looked at him doubtingly, as though expecting him to vanish from before her very sight. But her heart beat fast, and somehow it was wonderful—wonderful!

"Oh, Mr. Winthrop!" she began.

"Call me Orlando," he said, and it was almost more of a command than an entreaty.

"Very well, Orlando," she began again.

On the instant he had snapped her up.

"You will!" he cried. "You will marry me!"

"Oh, but Mr.—that is, Orlando," she protested.

"Dearest Kitty," he interrupted solemnly. "You might as well give in. I'm going to win you sooner or later; I am determined. And soon or late you will have to consent, so you might as well do it now!"

"You're dreadfully bossy," she said, but she laughed a little as she said it. "Suppose *I* have something to say?"

"Then say it, dearest, by all means," he declared, "provided it isn't that you won't marry me!"

"Well," said Kitty, trying hard to get herself in hand. "I do care—now wait—*but!* You see it's this way with me; I belong *here.* Oh, you don't know what the place means to me! I couldn't live anywhere else!"

"But you won't have to," protested Orlando.

"But where I lived, I'd have to—well, my

husband would have to be thoroughly respected!"

She had said it! And for a spell there was utter silence. How would he take it? Had she lost him by her frankness? Her heart beat painfully at the thought, and she watched his still profile with bated breath.

"I see!" he said at length. "You mean I've got to make good, first!"

There was fire in her tone as she replied.

"If only you could really become one of us!" she cried, "and still be yourself! Win the boys over because you are *you*, not by trying to be like them. I wouldn't have you do *that* altogether, for worlds! But win them over you must—if you are to stay. And unless you stay, how can I marry you—for it would mean leaving it all, my home—and I am all that father has now, to come back to at the end of his long trips! But even worse than any of these, your going away would mean that you were—were a failure!"

Again Orlando took his time in answering.

"You are right," he said at length. "And

I am going to fight—fight now harder than ever, to prove myself to them—and to you. And I shall win!"

He looked very upright and brave, and somehow not at all ridiculous now, despite the immense bone-rimmed spectacles and the silken garments. Her heart went out to him, and she stood up, almost within his embrace. Instantly his arms were about her, but she repulsed him gently, and he submitted, understanding.

"Not until you have won," she said in a low voice.

He picked up her hand and kissed it like a courtier.

"Until I have won," he repeated, taking his leave.

He waved his hat and was gone, followed by the devoted dog. And Kitty, completely overcome by the emotion of it all, curled herself into a ball like a cat, upon the cushion where he had been sitting, and stayed there a long while, very quietly.

And all the while that this was going on

Ted Barringer had been complaining in the back room of the hotel, about the manner in which his bear story was being ignored. The audience was fairly attentive, with one exception—the Bishop—who sulked behind a week-old newspaper. Suddenly he put it down, bringing his fist upon the table with a bang that startled the crowd.

"I've got it!" he shouted.

"Got what, in heaven's name?" growled Ted, whose discourse had thus been rudely interrupted.

"That bear-hunt you want!" said the Bishop excitedly; "we're gonner fix that Angora cat of a silk-pajama 'boss' of ours! You wanted to hunt bear—well, I got an idea you will—just listen!"

PART III

In the gray mystery of the ensuing dawn, a strange procession started down the main street of Letterbox, turning off abruptly just beyond the schoolhouse, and crossing the meadow, and the creek, by way of a small foot-bridge. There were six members to this shadowy company, and they moved with great stealth and silence; and in their midst they bore a something vaguely human in form, though so thoroughly disguised by the horse blanket in which it was wrapped, that its exact character was undefinable. The lean figure of Long Henry Robinson led the way, pushing aside wet branches, finding a path for the burden-bearers; and in the rear the Bishop's burly bulk moved ponderously. It was certainly a weird performance, and had something almost sinister about it—or

so it would have seemed to any casual observer, had any such been there; however, at this early hour they were without an audience.

Once across the creek, they struck off diagonally over the next field—a harvested alfalfa patch, treacherous in the dim light with stubble, and dotted with haystacks so that it seemed like a village of muskrat houses. Through this place they reached the main road to Le Barge, and, passing down it for about a mile, again left the well-worn tracks of common usage and plunged into the underbrush at the edge of the timber, still led by Long Henry—a skilled woodsman, and objectionably conscious of it. At length they found a spot suited to their purpose, and the four laid down the thing they carried—most unpleasantly suggestive of a mummy, it was—and wiped their brows. The Bishop looked about him with approval.

"Fine place," he commented, nodding his head in satisfaction. "Good thick under-

brush—no buildings within a mile—first-class approach for a huntin' party—everything's great! Let's unwrap him, boys."

They fell to with a will. Ted Barringer pushed back his hat and spat upon his hands.

"Judas Priest, but he's heavy!" exclaimed Ted. "Who'd have thought it, to look at him!"

The light cordage untied, they rolled the figure over, and out of its swaddling, exposing to view—a stuffed bear!

The creature was fully four feet high, and the taxidermists had posed him in an upright posture, the proverbial staff supporting him. He was of the breed known merely as "Black" and his coat had once been thick and handsome; but years of service as an ornament in a rear corner of Joe Beezer's bar had thinned it, and in places the hide showed all too plainly, giving him a pathetic, world-worn, weather-beaten look. Originally, he had been supplied with two glass eyes, round and golden, but one of these was now missing and his rowdy countenance was

permanently fixed in a leering wink. Taken altogether, he was about as disreputable-looking a bear as one would be likely to find anywhere. With many expletives they lifted him to his feet and awaited directions.

"Now we wanner set him up in the hawberry bushes somewhere round here," Bishop Coggney announced. "Over there in that thick clump. Easy now—just so his ears show plain and you can kind of see his snout. That's the way!"

Very carefully, so as to disturb the underbrush as little as possible, they lifted the stuffed bear into place under the Bishop's directions and then stood back with him to observe the effect. The latter chewed a sprig of timothy as he regarded the result with a critical eye, his head cocked on one side.

"Pull a little branch across his missin' eye!" he said at length.

Ted Barringer accomplished this completing touch, with the air of an artist.

"How's that?" he inquired.

"Slick!" replied a chorus.

"You certainly would be fooled by it," declared Long Henry, "if you didn't know it was a plant!"

"Will he topple over easy?" inquired the Bishop; "he ought to fall over when he's hit!"

"Sure, he'll fall," Windy Meeks assured him. "But one thing worries me. How long are you going to take getting here?"

"All day," declared the Bishop firmly. "We're going to start clear the other side of town—skirt West Mountain through the timber, and land up here when the feller's half dead with tiredness. Then he's goin' to triumphantly shoot this here bear after a hard day's huntin', and then when he drags out that twenty-year-old corpse we will kid him out of town!"

"All of which is a big idea, if it works—*if!*" remarked Long Henry.

"It'll work all right," growled the Bishop; "all he needs do is consent to come along with us. We will see to the rest—and the thing will make him such a laughing-stock,

there won't be room for him in the county, and you know it!"

"I do!" agreed Long Henry, and the party started back toward the hotel through the widening sunrise.

Early as it was, Orlando was down, when they returned, sneaking in by the back door, and for the most part appearing singly in the dining-room, so as not to excite suspicion. At sight of Orlando, however, Windy and the Bishop, who came in together, involuntarily exchanged a glance of surprise. For Orlando wore khaki this morning, in lieu of the white silk shirt, and behold! the big hat was no longer pinned up on one side, but flopped in a natural manner, like anyone else's. Also, instead of the stock, he wore a bandanna handkerchief tied loosely about his throat in a perfectly conventional way. This was good; but, unfortunately for his reputation, he was eating eggs in the most extraordinary manner—breaking off the tops and scooping them out with a spoon, instead of taking them fried, like a human. But,

otherwise, it was undeniable that he presented a greatly improved appearance. The Bishop crossed to him at once, and without any preliminaries began on the subject which was uppermost in his mind.

"'Morning, Mr. Winthrop," said he. "Say, you remember how Ted Barringer was talking yesterday about seein' bear tracks?"

"Ah! Good morning!" replied Orlando. "Yes, indeed, I remember something of the sort."

"Well," the Bishop went on, "it's turned out to be a fact that he really seen them; and it's got the boys all excited. They want to look into the matter. And so we kind of thought that maybe you would be interested, too, Mr. Winthrop."

"You mean they want to hunt for the creature," said Orlando, "and wish me to join them?"

"You get me," replied Coggney.

Orlando looked nonplussed, as though the situation were a very serious one, in which he scarcely knew how to act. Finally he

swung his kodak, which was hung over his shoulder, around, and patted it gently.

"You know I use only *this*, for my sort of hunting," he said. "My game has been secured pictorially almost exclusively. I'm afraid that a gun—"

"But you might make an exception," the Bishop suggested. Then he lowered his voice and leaned over confidentially. "The boys would think it sort of funny if you didn't shoot at all!"

Still Orlando looked perplexed. But after a moment of reflection he gave a reluctant consent.

"If that is really the case," said he, "I suppose I'd better go with you, and carry a gun, though I assure you it is against my principles."

"Don't let that worry you," said the Bishop cheerfully; "take it from me, *principles* ain't goin' to protect you much against a angry black bear! Call it self-defense if you like!"

"Well, I'll carry the thing, then," agreed Orlando, and so it was arranged.

When they had finished breakfast Orlando retired temporarily to his room, to prepare for the expedition. When he returned he looked more like a professor about to set forth upon a scientific undertaking than a rancher on the brink of a bear-hunt. His big hat had been replaced by a cap, the peak of which seemed to rest upon the top of his bone-rimmed spectacles; and about him hung his usual collection of impedimenta—field-glasses, microscope, a specimen basket, and a camera. With both hands he held firmly and bravely a beautiful new .30.30 Winchester. The Bishop arose from his lounging place on the porch and slouched toward him, wondering how he could persuade him to shed some of those trappings, when a gleam lit in Orlando's eye, and abruptly brushing by the Bishop with a scant word of apology, he crossed the road, while the Bishop staring after him open-mouthed watched him greet—Kitty!

And, for her part, Kitty experienced one of those pleasing shocks of the tenderly antici-

pated abruptly coming true; and a warm glow enveloped her as she greeted him.

"Oh!" she said, "why, where on earth are you off to so early—not to the ranch?"

He tapped his Winchester somewhat ruefully.

"No," he said, "it's a bear-hunt!"

"A bear-hunt!" she repeated after him. It was amazing. "But I thought you—"

"You thought right," he said hurriedly. "I don't believe in killing things for sport. But the men were most anxious to go, and to have me go along, and seemed to want me to be a real member of the party, which of course meant carrying a gun. And so after what you said last night, you know, about my making good with them, why, I—"

A flood of pleasure swept her like a warm wave. He was right! It was his chance, and he was taking it!

"Good!" she cried. "Oh, I am glad you are going! For if you come out of this with credit—and I know you will—it is going to

make the greatest difference in your position with them."

"And consequently with you!" he added in a low tone.

"It might be the foundation of—of a good many things," she said, looking away, the slow color mantling her cheeks. "A man's real character comes out on a hunt, and nobody knows it better than the boys."

"And you think mine will stand the test!" he said. "Thank you, Kitty."

It made her heart leap to hear him. But she pretended to ignore it. She must, until he had gone through with his probation. No time to weaken now! So she only smiled brightly, and turned into the schoolhouse door. "Good luck!" she called over her shoulder, "and—and—good luck!"

"I'll see you as soon as we get back," he replied, raising his cap.

Then Kitty went up the deserted length of the schoolroom to her seat, and sinking down into it buried her face in her arms upon the desk, her cheeks burning, and glad—oh, so

glad that the boys had asked him to go along! When at length she raised her head her eyes were shining like stars.

Meanwhile the Bishop had led out a couple of horses, and the rest of The Outfit was mounted and ready. There was an air of extreme innocence about the group, which would perhaps have warned a more experienced hand, but Orlando was apparently merely delighted at their friendly aspect, and climbed upon the mild steed which the foreman had provided, with considerable confidence and grace. The Bishop eyed him with acrimony as he mounted, a suave exterior hiding a sea of spleen.

The devil and all take the fellow—what in blazes did Kitty mean by smiling on him that way? Well, wait until to-morrow—he, the Bishop, would have a tale to tell that would make her ashamed to even be so much as seen talking to Orlando. And that would be the story, of how the owner of The Winthrop Outfit spent all day chasing absolutely nothing, and ended by shooting a stuffed

bear in full sight of all his men! Meanwhile it was a very pleasant morning. The Bishop rolled a cigarette, lit it, and led the little cavalcade off down the sunny street. A few villagers watched them go, even the Chinaman waving a lackadaisical farewell. Those Smith twins, being early for school, followed a little way in noisy, unasked-for escort; lagging behind at the edge of the town, with many a gibe. And then the horses took to the road at a brisk pace, traveling north.

The day was cool with that first hint of winter which is so lovely when it is still overmastered by the warmth of the sun. The air was like a fine sparkling tonic, that filled one with the will to do—to ride endlessly under the clean blue sky. It moved the party to song, Orlando gently chanting his favorite French theme, scarcely above his breath:

"Je donnerai Versailles . . ."

And Windy Meeks, not to be outdone, wailing a well-known chanty in a high falsetto:

"Oh, bury me not on the lone prairie-e-e—
Where wild coyotes howl over me . . ."

The horses felt the magic of the weather, too, being fresh from their forty-eight hours of rest, and even the inanimate things gleamed in the brilliant light, as though laughing; the buckles of the horses' trappings, the metal on the guns, the buttons of the Bishop's coat, Ted Barringer's new spurs—even the very mica on the roads, all seemed to rejoice in the sun. Orlando, riding in the company of Long Henry Robinson, just ahead of Coggney, sat very upright on his horse, palpably alert and excited. He had taken off the cap and stuffed it into his pocket, and the breeze ruffled his hair, giving him more than ever a boyish appearance, save for those terrible and tremendous bone-rimmed glasses. Indeed he looked so young and innocent, and strangely likable, that for an instant the Bishop's hatred and contempt weakened. But only for an instant. Nonsense! The fellow must be put in his place!

The furthest outlying house of Letterbox

had been passed now, and they were rounding Fossil hill. The country spread on either hand like a vast private estate, with unfenced, limitless fields, and sage—an ocean of sage-brush—stretching to the left as far as the eye could see. The Bishop spied a familiar, though almost indiscernible track ahead, and called out to Barringer:

"Will we cut off here?" he asked with a wink.

"Yep," responded Ted. "It was at the mouth of Fontenell cañon I seen the tracks." And with a great air of adventure the party left the main road.

He who rides through the brush for the first time feels himself indeed in the wild and woolly West. There is a spaciousness, a hint of the vastness of the world about the experience, that lifts the heart and invokes the awed respect of the traveler. Furthermore, it is like the descriptions in fiction, and scenes in the movies—impossible, yet there before one's very eyes! The Bishop was well aware of this, and watched the back

of Orlando's head attentively. It was affecting him as desired, that was plain. He was already beginning to fall under the spell of excitement which had been planned. And then, even as Coggney watched contentedly, Orlando did the unexpected.

Fifty yards ahead of the horsemen a huge jack-rabbit came out of the brush and loped rapidly across the trail. Instantly there was the report of a gun. In his anxiety to show them he was not afraid to shoot, Orlando had lost no time. The rest of the group instantly set up a pandemonium, shouting and laughing and hooting. In their midst, Orlando, getting his nag under control, was the only one who did not smile.

"Heh! What the devil are you shooting at?" yelled the Bishop. "What the—"

"Why, did you not see that wild animal?" inquired Orlando mildly. "I thought—"

"Wild animal!" howled the Bishop, coming alongside. "What did you think it was?"

"It looked like a young antelope to me," replied Orlando.

"Antelope my eye!" retorted the Bishop. "That was a harmless jack-rabbit!"

"Indeed!" said Orlando, immensely interested. "How very large they are! And how extremely fortunate that I did not hit the poor thing!"

The Bishop looked at him with blood in his eye, positively awed out of the power of speech. But behind him, the others felt no such restraint, rocking in their saddles with joyous mirth. Windy Meeks wiped his eyes of the first tears he had shed in many a day.

"God!" said he when he could speak at all, "what a show! And what a *name* for him!"

"What do you mean, name?" gasped Long Henry.

"He ought to be Antelope Jack after this," said Windy. "Get me?"

"Jack-rabbit — antelope! Of course we do!" replied Ted Barringer with all the proper admiration due to genius. "Antelope Jack it is!"

"Perfect!" agreed Long Henry, slapping his thigh. But somehow, though they

laughed anew, the very fact of having given him a nickname brought him a little closer into their own ranks, and they liked him better for it. Orlando could never get a standing there—Antelope Jack had a ghost of a chance.

The procession regained some sort of order after this, and with the Bishop in the lead with Winthrop, to see that the latter be given every opportunity to make a further fool of himself, they proceeded on their way. The detour they planned was a wide one, and so it was almost noon when they reached the mouth of Holland Creek cañon and dismounted. It was a lovely spot near a thin stream, which the trees followed out into the desert, at regular intervals, marching single file, stiff as soldiers, out of the cool verdure of the cañon and the vast hordes of their kind; out among the brush, the gravel, venturing as far as they dared along the water's edge. The Bishop was the first off his horse.

"We'll camp here," he announced, "get our dinner, and proceed on foot!"

Orlando looked a trifle weary as he dismounted, and listened to the Bishop's words with some dismay.

"Leave the horses?"

"Bears scares 'em!" replied Coggney briefly. And the rest set about making camp. By the time the meal was ready Orlando had disappeared.

"Where's Antelope Jack?" demanded Long Henry, the cook, a tower of wrath with a frying-pan suspended menacingly. "Are we to wait all day?"

"Not by a dam' sight," declared the Bishop. "Come on, Windy, you and me'll be nursemaids and go find him!"

They turned into the woods, hallooing as they went, and presently a faint answer rewarded them. A few steps further on and there under a low-branched live-oak tree stood Orlando, gazing enraptured at a huge nest of some sort of insect which hung from a limb and which he was examining with the aid of his magnifying-glass. The two rangers drew back with a single movement.

"Heh, get away from that!" yelled Windy. "You'll get stung to death!"

Orlando looked around in surprise, beckoning them to come nearer.

"Look out, you!" roared the Bishop, "leave that thing alone! It's a hornets' nest!"

"I know it!" replied Orlando mildly. "Do come and take a nearer look at it. It's the most perfect specimen I ever saw! If you are very quiet they won't hurt you!"

"Thanks! Haven't time!" the Bishop returned, keeping a safe distance. "Dinner's waitin'!"

"Oh, I'm sorry if I've kept you!" apologized Orlando, reluctantly putting up his magnifying-glass and joining them. "I didn't realize how the time was going. And it is really a most perfect specimen—"

Conversation lagged on the return trip, but the Bishop kept looking at his boss out of the corner of one eye. What manner of man was this, anyhow, who did not fear hornets! Either it was terribly sporting of him or it wasn't human!

They did not break camp after dinner, but left their belongings and the horses, and set out afoot, turning in toward the wide bosom of the mountain, and crossing as great a variety of country as the Bishop could manage to select. Sometimes it was sage, waist high, trail-less, sometimes a delicate forest of quaking-asp or cottonwood, that whispered above them; sometimes he led them over the brown carpet between cathedral-like pine trees, where the high shoulder of a mountain kept the cañon shadowed and preserved the snows. Again it was through a greasewood patch, treacherous and hard to traverse, full of little hummocks topped by unfriendly bushes; impossible to step upon, almost impossible to step around. Or across a piece of rolling, open, boulder-strewn upland, where the autumn winds swept free and strong, and the mountains spread themselves to view like endless, sleeping monsters. Again it was by the side of a stream that they went, breaking a new track through the underbrush—a no mean

task. And although they were actually never more than a few miles from town, a wilder, more adventurous country could scarcely have been found. And as far as the Bishop led so far Orlando followed valiantly. Indeed, one might say easily, for the whole way he was close at the Bishop's heels, even in advance of him when something in the way of beetle or plant attracted his eye. Walking, it appeared, was something he knew how to do, and his wiriness and long habit of nature-studying were standing him in good stead. This was all very well for those that like walking, but The Winthrop Outfit, taken as a whole, were accustomed to the constant substitute of a good horse's four legs for their own; and as the afternoon waned they grew tired, if Orlando did not, and the amusing side of the situation began to seem to Long Henry much too long in manifesting itself. At an auspicious moment he drew the Bishop aside sufficiently to get a private word with him.

"Say, Bishop, how much longer?" he panted. "I'm having a good time—not!"

"Wait!" commanded the Bishop. "We'll bring things to a finish in less than an hour. The sun's getting near the top of the mountains now."

"Well, I'd like to see him perform!" pronounced Long Henry. "That is, if he's goin' to!"

"We'll take him across Bear River, then," replied Coggney. "Seems like we should bring him in touch with some sort of bear, seein' we ain't as yet shown him any tracks less'n a week old."

"I don't think he realizes that," said Long Henry, "but you're on, about the river. We'll ford it," and he went back to tell the others—with the exception of Orlando, who at the moment appeared to be absorbed in the flight of a perfectly ordinary crow.

The day was drawing toward a roseate end, when Bear River was actually reached, and the party stood daunted, on the bank of that sullen stream. On either hand lay

flats of alkali and clay, which the water had cut into a considerable arroyo with steep and unstable sides. The river was widespread and dark with the constant wash from the banks, and moved as slowly as thick cream. To the untutored eye it seemed bottomless, and there it was, stretching away before them; a barrier to progress. Only one alternative offered to turning back, and that was to ford it. On the brink the boys gathered in a little knot and disputed as to which should go first.

"Hey, Bishop, you go!" suggested Long Henry Robinson, an odd gleam in his eye, as if he felt that Coggney ought to take the medicine.

"Not me!" the Bishop answered, growling. "I ain't takin' no risks at my age. Why, it might be all quicksand out there in the middle!"

"Go yourself, Long Henry!" said Windy Meeks. "It'll do you good if it's up to your neck."

A momentary scuffle ensued upon this,

which the Bishop interrupted authoritatively.

"No fooling now!" he shouted. "Somebody's got to go first—come on, speak up, why don't yer?"

From the midst of the momentary silence which this demand produced emerged the voice of Orlando.

"Why, I'll go first, if you like," said he quietly. "I'm not a very good swimmer, but the current is sluggish. I'll go!"

Everybody looked at everybody else, and then at the Bishop, who nodded.

"Just as you say, Mr. Winthrop," he said, "though I warn you I've no idea how deep she runs, nor if there's quicksands."

"Oh, that's all right," Orlando DeLancy Winthrop added cheerfully, swinging off his camera and handing it to Long Henry for safekeeping. "I absolve you from all responsibility!"

And to the delight of the audience he proceeded to wade right in.

At the first few steps the water reached

only to his ankles. A step or two more and it reached a few inches higher, midway up his boots. Out into the stream he went, further and further, but the waters failed to rise. Toward midstream he grew cautious, feeling his way with dainty gingerliness—but still the water came up no further and the men on the bank clung to each other for joy. But when he reached the opposite shore, the tops of his boots still dry, there was something in the expression of his face that made the trick seem not so very funny after all. He was sarcastic—but with a subtlety which only Long Henry really understood.

"See, you need have no fear!" he called. And shamefacedly they waded in, the lot of them, Long Henry treasuring the camera that had been entrusted to him, and commenting to Windy on the situation.

"It was dam' plucky!" he declared in an undertone. "*He* didn't know it was safe."

But Windy wouldn't be converted.

"I ain't so sure!" he declared. "Matter

of fact, it's impossible to tell if it was accidental or not!"

"Bah!" replied Long Henry. At which juncture the party became reunited on dry land once more and the hunt was renewed.

A heavy silence had fallen on the group, and a boredom so complete, as far as the majority was concerned, that it seemed nothing would relieve it. Then two facts evinced themselves which changed matters. First, it became evident that they were at length approaching the hollow where the stuffed bear was hidden, and second, right in this neighborhood, Ted Barringer stopped abruptly and seized the Bishop's arm with a shout.

"What did I tell yer!" he yelled. "Fresh bear tracks! *Now!* Now say I'm a liar!"

And there sure enough was the track—so new that the bear could not be far ahead of them. In an instant the party came to life, and a general movement of preparedness took possession of them. The rest of the men looked to their rifles, but Orlando was torn

between observation of the fast-fading light of day and the shutter of his camera.

"I'm fearfully afraid it's no use!" he exclaimed pettishly. "Too dark, by far! How disappointing!"

The Bishop and Windy, however, were taking council. This development was practically unforeseen, and distinctly complicated matters.

"What'll we do?" said Windy. "S'pose we meet up with a real one! You're gonner have a hard time dealing with Ted!"

"Chances o' fortune," returned the Bishop philosophically. "Got to take 'em! We'll go ahead as arranged. If we meet the real bear, which I admit seems likely, we can't tell what *will* happen! We just got to hope we won't meet it, that's all! But remember, when we come to the plant, Orlando is to fire—and only *him!* Make Ted understand it!"

Windy Meeks nodded, and the party went on, this time with an earnestness born of the new element in it. The woods were dark

and full of strange shadows, and the underbrush seemed to move of itself, as though designedly to startle and deceive. The wind had died down with the sun, but the aspens quaked and rustled in a ghostly fashion. The party moved forward silently, and now and again the unaccounted-for snapping of a twig would cause a momentary alarm. The Bishop looked anxiously about him at every step, and even Orlando put aside his interest in lesser creatures and the ways of wild flowers, and walked eagerly, his beautiful new Winchester ready, his bone-rimmed spectacles fixed on the Bishop's every movement, watching for a cue. There was a look of determination on his face, and he seemed bound to acquit himself with credit if it was his last deed on earth!

For the next quarter of a mile the Bishop's soul was racked with anxiety. Suppose they met the bear—? He didn't half like the brutes, anyhow! It was an anxious time. But at last the appointed spot was gained without further signs of the enemy,

and then, distantly, in the hawberry bushes they could discern the creature they had set there in the dawn of this long day. At the length of a gun-shot it was completely and marvelously deceptive. It was almost dark now, and in the shadow the creature seemed positively to move, so real it looked. The Bishop's heart swelled with satisfaction as he posted himself at Orlando's elbow, waving back the apparently impetuous aim of the others.

"Now, Mr. Winthrop," he whispered excitedly, "take your time! Right between the eyes!"

With trembling and reluctance Orlando obeyed, closed his eyes, and pulled the trigger. There was a report, a little puff of smoke, and—the stuffed bear had disappeared from sight!

For a dazed moment the Bishop stood wondering. What the devil and all did it mean? *Was* it the stuffed bear? The memory of those fresh tracks was full upon him and caused a growing uneasiness in his mind.

"You got him!" Long Henry was yelling like a madman. "Come on after him, fellers!"

"After him nothin'!" thundered Ted Barringer. "He's only wounded! Don't go after a wounded bear in this light! Are you all crazy?"

"That's right!" agreed the Bishop, his own doubts about the identity of the animal confirmed, and seizing upon this solution of the quandary they put him into. "Don't go after him! It's too dangerous!"

"Do you think I really got him?" asked Orlando a trifle piteously.

"Oh, you got him all right!" declared Long Henry. "He won't go far—that's impossible! And he'll leave a trail."

"Best thing to do is to come back after him in the morning," suggested Barringer. The lot of them were exchanging questioning glances. Evidently the Bishop was not the only one who misdoubted that animal!

"A very good idea," declared Coggney uneasily. "We'll hike back to camp, and return to these parts first thing in the morning!"

A perfunctory search in the immediate vicinity was indulged in by some of the party, but it was done under a chorus of assents to Ted's suggestion, and then they made the best of their way back to camp, while the stars came out piercingly clear on an azure dark sky, and the night shut in like a canopy flung across the tops of the mountains.

When Bishop Coggney awoke it was already day. There was a stirring and a calling of birds in the trees, and a soft west wind was blowing. Overhead the sky was already blue; but by rolling on one side he could observe that the little clouds just above the mountain crest were still of a lovely rosy tint. The air was full of that mysterious urge of the new day, caught at its triumphal entry upon the world, and the Bishop drew it in with great breaths, luxuriating in the mere fact of being alive, before he aroused himself to full consciousness of his affairs. Suddenly he remembered Orlando and sat up abruptly, surveying the still sleeping camp. There lay Long Henry with his

mouth slightly open, his face particularly thin under the cruel light; there was Windy curled up like a pup, and Ted Barringer asleep face downward. There were Joe and the others, all grotesquely slumbering, and there—there was Orlando's blanket, neatly folded, and Orlando's beautiful new Winchester lying on top of it. But nowhere—nowhere was there a sign of the owner!

The Bishop crossed his legs, scratched his towsled head, and sat there wondering; while the last vestige of sleepiness forsook him. Where, in the midst of this wilderness, could Orlando have gone to? That it was a deliberate and not a momentary absence was evident from the neatness with which his belongings had been arranged; that it was not final was evinced by the fact that his things were there at all! Had he actually ventured out into underbrush where he thought a wounded bear, and a savage bear, was in all likelihood lurking, and taken nothing for protection? With the natural difficulty due to his bulk, the Bishop arose, and

lumbered over to that deserted little pile of goods, to take careful stock of them. There were the blankets, the gun, the field-glasses, the specimen basket—*but not the camera!* Great heavens, that was it! The camera!

"Hey, fellers, wake up!" the Bishop roared, rushing from one to another of the reluctantly responsive sleepers. "Wake up! That boob of an Antelope Jack couldn't wait to collect his stuffed bear, and has gone off to take a photograph of him in the early morning light!"

With many a yawn and growl the camp came to life and struggled to its feet.

"Gone after his bear!" exclaimed Windy Meeks, stretching prodigiously, "with his camera!"

"And if he gets there ahead of us, we're goin' to miss the pleasure of seein' him discover it's stuffed!" moaned Long Henry.

"To say nothin' of givin' him a chance to get rid of it, which he'd be pretty sure to do!" added Windy.

"That is, if it was our bear!" remonstrated Ted Barringer.

"Oh, it was our bear all right enough," declared the Bishop cheerfully. Things looked far more normal in the day, and his twilight doubts had vanished with the shadows. So had the doubts of the others; only Ted grumbled anything like a question, which was drowned in the general clamor as the search party set forth, the Bishop, as usual, leading the way, and metaphorically beating his breast as he went.

"To miss it!" he kept muttering over and over, "to miss him goin' after that stuffed animal with a kodak! And after all the trouble we've took! To miss it! Hurry, fellers!"

But the Bishop was not fated to miss what Orlando was doing that morning; for before they had more than half covered the distance to the spot where the bear from Beezer's bar had been left, they encountered Orlando himself; and not by overtaking him, either, for Orlando was coming toward them. It

was in a stretch of comparatively open land that the meeting occurred—on a plateau strewn with boulders, with here and there a clump of seedlings, or an ancient stump; and it was over this rolling down that Orlando approached them. They came upon him suddenly, as they rounded the crest of a little hill, and at the sight of him there was a general outcry and a scattering for shelter, for Orlando was not alone. Far from it, for, as he came strolling unconcernedly in their direction, he was accompanied by a bear—a perfectly good real live bear that walked by itself—limping, but still walking—a live and conscious bear with a pink tongue lolling out, and, to the stricken and magnifying eyes of the observers, a most savage appearance! The Bishop was the first to reach shelter, choosing for his trench the nearest group of boulders. From this dubious screen he yelled a warning to Orlando, who was still about a hundred yards distant.

"Look out, you poor nut! There's a bear right behind you!" screamed the Bishop.

Orlando, however, merely nodded and smiled as he called back:

"Yes, I know it!"

"Then run, for God's sake!" pleaded the Bishop. "You may get away from him—he's awful lame! Run!"

But Orlando was not to be reckoned with now any more than at other of the preceding critical points in his career. For, instead of observing this excellent advice, and clearing out at least sufficiently to permit one of the rescue party to shoot the wild beast, he deliberately turned about and regarded it. Then he stopped short. The bear also stopped. Then—incredible sight—Orlando sat down upon the little knoll and the bear sat down beside him, raised itself upon its haunches like a begging dog, and held out the wounded paw; when, lo and behold! it could be seen, even at this distance, that the paw was wrapped in a bandage which Orlando proceeded to gently and carefully readjust, re-enforcing it with a clean pocket handkerchief, and ending the per-

formance with a pat on the creature's head. The bear received all these attentions with a becoming gravity, and at their end he and Orlando both arose and resumed their course.

From behind shrub and rock came forth a shamefaced and subdued group of sheep-rangers, who strove, and strove in vain, to laugh. Instead, it was Orlando who grinned, though not maliciously, as he and his companion came up with them, when it was perceived that the bear was really quite a small one after all.

"Here it is!" said Orlando, "poor little thing! As you see, I wounded its paw last night; but I fixed it up—it isn't serious a bit—and I have got some splendid pictures of him!"

The Bishop edged nearer, his face working in a peculiar manner. Then he held out his hand with a gesture worthy of a monarch surrendering his sword. The Bishop knew when he was beaten.

"Mr. Winthrop," he said huskily, "I—I want to shake hands with you, sir! That's

a brave thing—bringing in a wild, more than half-grown cub!"

"Thank you. But I don't really believe it's a wild one!" protested Orlando as he grasped the Bishop's hand. "See, there is a little ring through one ear."

At this Windy Meeks came forward and examined the creature gingerly but thoroughly. Then he let out a whoop that brought the echoes from the hills.

"Why, it's Frank the dago's bear that got lost!" he yelled.

"So it is!" agreed Long Henry, and the rest crowded about confirmingly, full of amazement.

"What yer goin' to do with him, Mr. Winthrop?" inquired Windy.

"Say, go on—call me Antelope Jack," remarked Orlando unexpectedly.

"Call you—!" gasped Windy. Then he looked straight into Orlando's eyes—right through the bone-rimmed spectacles for the first time, and held out his hand.

"Jack!" he said.

"That's it," agreed Orlando, returning

the strong grip hardily. And then there followed an uproar like that at the end of a football game, which the hills echoed again, and the little black bear swayed back and forth to the rhythm of it. And when at length Orlando had shaken hands with everyone and was quite limp in consequence, he made a protesting gesture.

"Now let's go back to town!" said he. "I want to take the cub to a friend of mine for a pet!"

All the long way back the Bishop seemed in a daze. Every once in a while he looked over at Orlando and shook his head, as though unconvinced that it was not all a dream. And this state of semi-coma lasted all through the noon meal at Joe Beezer's hotel and far into the afternoon. It troubled Long Henry Robinson, who, after dinner, sat beside the Bishop on the porch, while the two of them watched Orlando turn in at Kitty's gate, leading the bear, to the infinite disgust of that well-known scoundrel of a watch-dog who dared not follow. When

man and bear had passed within those sacred precincts, and the two watchers had seen Kitty's arms fly out to welcome her guest in an unmistakable manner, Long Henry broke the long silence.

"Fine feller, Antelope Jack!" he said. "He deserves her more'n we do!"

The Bishop said nothing to this. Long Henry, not to be discouraged, persevered in his determination to arouse his friend from a silence so unnatural.

"Well, he's gonner stay. That's pretty plain!" remarked Long Henry. "And for one, I am glad. Whatcher goin' to do about it? Resign?"

"Resign, hell! I should say not!" growled the Bishop fiercely, "after the way he led in that bear? Not much! I'm gonner work for him and learn him to run his ranch!"

"But it was a *tame* bear," objected Long Henry Robinson.

"Aw—aw, you ain't got no judgment of character!" the Bishop retorted. "He didn't know *that* when he went out after it!"